

July 23
2016



CHILDREN'S SABBATH

The Lord Is My Shephard!

**OPENING
HYMN:**
His Sheep
Am I #84:
He Is
Our Song

**SCRIPTURE
READING:**
PSALM 23

**CLOSING
HYMN:**
I Would
Be like Jesus
#311:
Seventh-day
Adventist
Hymnal

SERMON

IT IS MY DESIRE that God's blessing be present as we review together one of the most beautiful and encouraging Psalms in the Bible. By carefully reading the beautiful 23rd Psalm, the word RELATION shines out at the heart of it. The Bible is full of examples of how beautiful and special it is to have a relationship with Jesus and its results.

When I think of that word, one name comes to mind: Enoch. Do you remember who Enoch was? Even though the Bible does not mention many of those who lived before the flood, God has always counted on a few who are faithful to Him. The Bible refers to Enoch as a friend of God. You cannot be friends without having a good relationship. Enoch was faithful, a servant of God who had his heart in tune with Jesus. Amos 3:3 (NIV) says, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" God and Enoch were in agreement and the Bible tells us that Enoch walked with God. He remained close to God and walked according to God for 365 years!

Enoch did not know how long he would live. However, his friendship with God was such that it was not a matter of time, but rather, of a heart full of empathy and obedience.

Enoch was a very intelligent and humble man. He was saddened to see evil increasing on earth. He tried not to spend time with

those who dishonored God. Whenever he could, he preferred to distance himself and talk to his Friend God. Despite living on earth, his heart drew nearer every day to the God of heaven. For that reason we find in Genesis 5:24 (NIV) that, "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

The antediluvians did not hear the warnings of Enoch, a man of principle who walked with God. Sadly, today many of us also reject the warnings that Jesus has left us. We need to befriend Jesus in order for our hearts to think and act like Him. As a well-known adage says, "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are." Sometimes our parents and elders warn us not to befriend certain people, not to learn their customs, and not to act like them. The longer we spend with someone, the more we resemble that person. For this reason, Enoch was ready to be with Him whom he knew and with whom he was united in thought and behavior.

Enoch did not allow the activities of everyday life to separate him from God. No matter how many his chores and activities were, he always sought to spend time with his Friend, God.

There is a chorus that comes to my mind almost every day, especially when I open my eyes in the morning. It goes like this:

"In the morning I extend my praise to the God who was and is my only Hope. In the morning I will invoke with my soul, and beg Him to give me His sweet calm. He listens to us because he loves us so much, and relieves us of any calamity; He gives us His powerful and strong hand to deliver us from death itself."

Actually this hymn speaks of several important words found in Psalm 23: hope, rest, safety, protection, eternity. All of this we find in our friendship and security in our good Shepherd, our best [Friend]. There is no better relationship.

RELATIONSHIP is an active word that involves more than one person. It is an activity that should exist between us and our God. We cannot have a relationship with someone we do not speak with, with someone we do not interact with, someone we do not know. We need to develop this RELATIONSHIP with God in prayer, in reading His Word, in the silence of communion with Him where we can hear His voice. Just by having that RELATIONSHIP, we can receive all of the actions found in Psalm 23.

What are some important ingredients necessary in order to develop and have a relationship with God?

1. Time. What is your first thought when you wake up? Is it the game, breakfast, your phone, or God? What occupies your first thought is what you are devoting your relationship time to. Is your prayer short and memorized; do you recite it without realizing what you said? Do you pass the "requirement" of prayer, your communication with God, to give your time to what really interests you?

2. Obedience. Is yours an obedience that comes from a heartfelt desire to do His will? You serve Him, you obey Him, and take delight in His presence, not through obligation or fear of the consequences, or even to obtain heaven.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (HCSB) tells us, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to draw near in obedience than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong."

3. Sincerity. We must come to God with all sincerity because He already knows our thoughts, but He wants to see a heart like His.

It is said that a teacher once asked the children in her Bible class to write a prayer. She gave them paper and pencil. The teacher noticed that there was a girl who was writing the alphabet. When the teacher asked her why she had written the alphabet instead of a prayer, the girl replied: "I wrote the alphabet so that Jesus could pick out the letters He wanted to use to make a prayer."

We do not need to do that, but we do need to know that no matter what we write, no matter what we say, God knows what is in our heart. We need to come to Him as we are and tell Him what we feel and what we do. He will hear us and help us when we seek Him with a sincere heart.

4. Love. The Lord is my Shephard, I shall not want. . . . We find a Lord full of love who provides, heals, guides, and protects; One who is faithful, who gives us hope, who gives us His blessing, and who offers us eternal life. Everything for love.

1 John 3:1-3: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

What is our response to His love? Do we love Him because we want to live forever or do we love Him for what He did for us? Many of us are afraid of an eternal death and come to church and obey in the hopes that God will give us eternal life. But without love, nothing that we do matters; we will not gain eternal life.

The love we feel for God is the love that drives us to do good, to love our neighbors, family members, friends, and church members with a love that makes us think about them before ourselves. It is a love that compels us to share the love of God, the truth of His Word with others, because our love is extended to all and for the sole purpose that no one should perish,

but have everlasting life as one of the verses we often repeat says: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

How many of us want to tell God this morning, "Lord, I want to be Your friend like Enoch was; I want to be able to walk with You every day of my life and for my heart to be like Yours"; help us to be like You, shepherds in Your fold that provide love, rest, healing, protection, and hope.

If this is your wish, stand up and pray with me that God will help us to love others as He loves us and to relate with Him so that, in being like Him, we can live with Him forever.

Let us pray.

Thank you Lord for Your promises.
Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful
Psalm You have left for us
that we will keep in our hearts.
Help us to not forget that You are our Shepherd
and that You will always be by our side.
Help us to love like You.
Help us to relate with You in such a way that
You can change our hearts in order to be
open to Your voice
and thus, help others to know and love
You for eternity.
We love You, Lord,
AMEN.

*Dinorah Rivera, director of Children
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